

### News Release

Reps. Wilson, Herseth and Sanders

U.S. Congress

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### **Lawmakers Introduce Bill to Fight Homelessness**

Bill Boosts Minimum Funds for Many Rural States

**Washington, DC** -- Reps. Heather Wilson (R-NM), Stephanie Herseth (D-SD) and Bernie Sanders (I-VT) today announced a bill to help the homeless suffering from mental illness in rural America.

The Wilson-Herseth-Sanders legislation increases the minimum funding states receive, benefiting states with rural populations such as New Mexico, South Dakota, and Vermont.

Projects for Assistance in Transition from Homelessness (PATH) was created under the Public Health Service Act in 1990. It is a formula Block Grant to provide services for homeless or those at imminent risk of becoming homeless because of mental illness. The program has been successful in identifying homeless people suffering from mental illness and getting them the medical treatment they need to lead stable lives.

However, the current funding formula for PATH was developed 15 years ago and fails to account for increasing homelessness in states with rural and frontier populations. As such, several states have not had an increase in PATH funding since the program's inception in 1991.

"We need to make sure every state has the resources to identify and help people who are homeless and suffering from mental illness," Wilson said. "This program has been effective at bringing stability to their lives and funding for it should be equitable."

Herseth, who is co-chair of the House Democratic Rural Working Group, said, "Far too often, rural America is left out of the big policy debates in Washington. Congress must recognize that rural states like South Dakota have unique needs and challenges. People think homelessness doesn't affect rural communities with a strong agricultural base. But in South Dakota, nearly half of our homeless are working and another quarter are children. The President has established a goal of eliminating homelessness by the year 2012, and this legislation is an important step toward making that goal a reality in rural states like South Dakota."

"For far too long, states like Vermont have been severely underfunded in their efforts to fight the serious problem of rural homelessness," Sanders said. "I am delighted to join my colleagues from New Mexico and South Dakota today to introduce bipartisan legislation aimed at reversing this chronic underfunding and ensuring that rural states are adequately assisted in their efforts to deal with this terrible problem. Vermont has not received an increase in federal funding for its efforts to fight homelessness in 14 years. Our legislation would double the minimum amount

received by small states such as Vermont and put rural states across the country back on track in their efforts to address this crisis that leaves an estimated 600,00 Americans homeless every night."

To operate, PATH requires matching funds, \$1 state for each \$3 federal. The minimum mandated allotment for states and District of Columbia (D.C.) is \$300,000. Additional funds are then distributed via a formula based on a proportion of "the population living in urbanized areas of the State."

This Bill increases PATH minimums to \$600,000. The minimum amount states could receive under the bill would be increased from \$300,000 to \$600,000. The legislation also includes a protection for urban states, so increases to the minimums would not come out of their PATH allocations.

While Congress has increased overall PATH funding to \$55 million, many states such as New Mexico, South Dakota and Vermont continue to receive the same minimum allocation they received in 1991.

The Wilson, Herseth, Sanders legislation fights homelessness by increasing PATH minimums to correct unbalanced formula distributions.